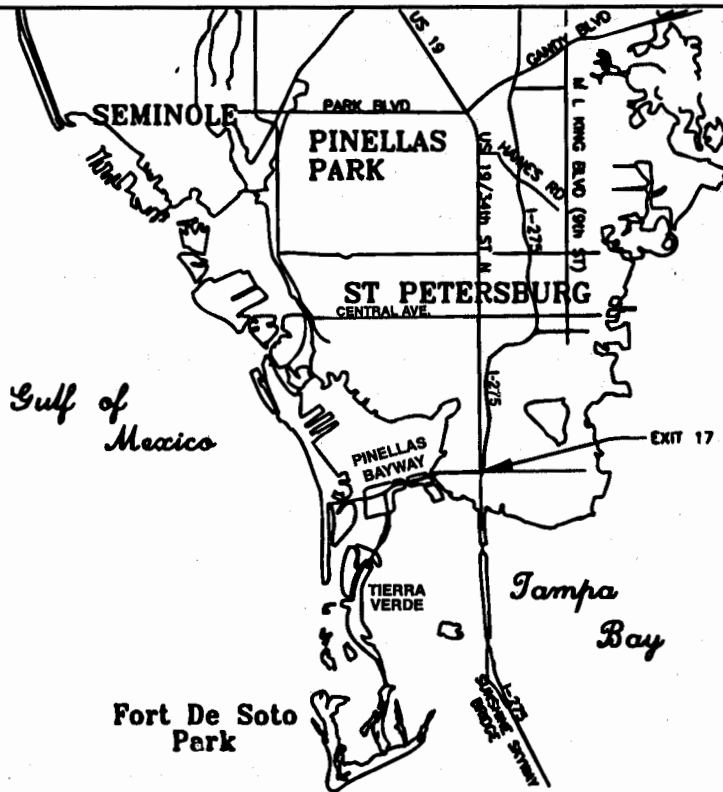


# FORT DE SOTO PARK

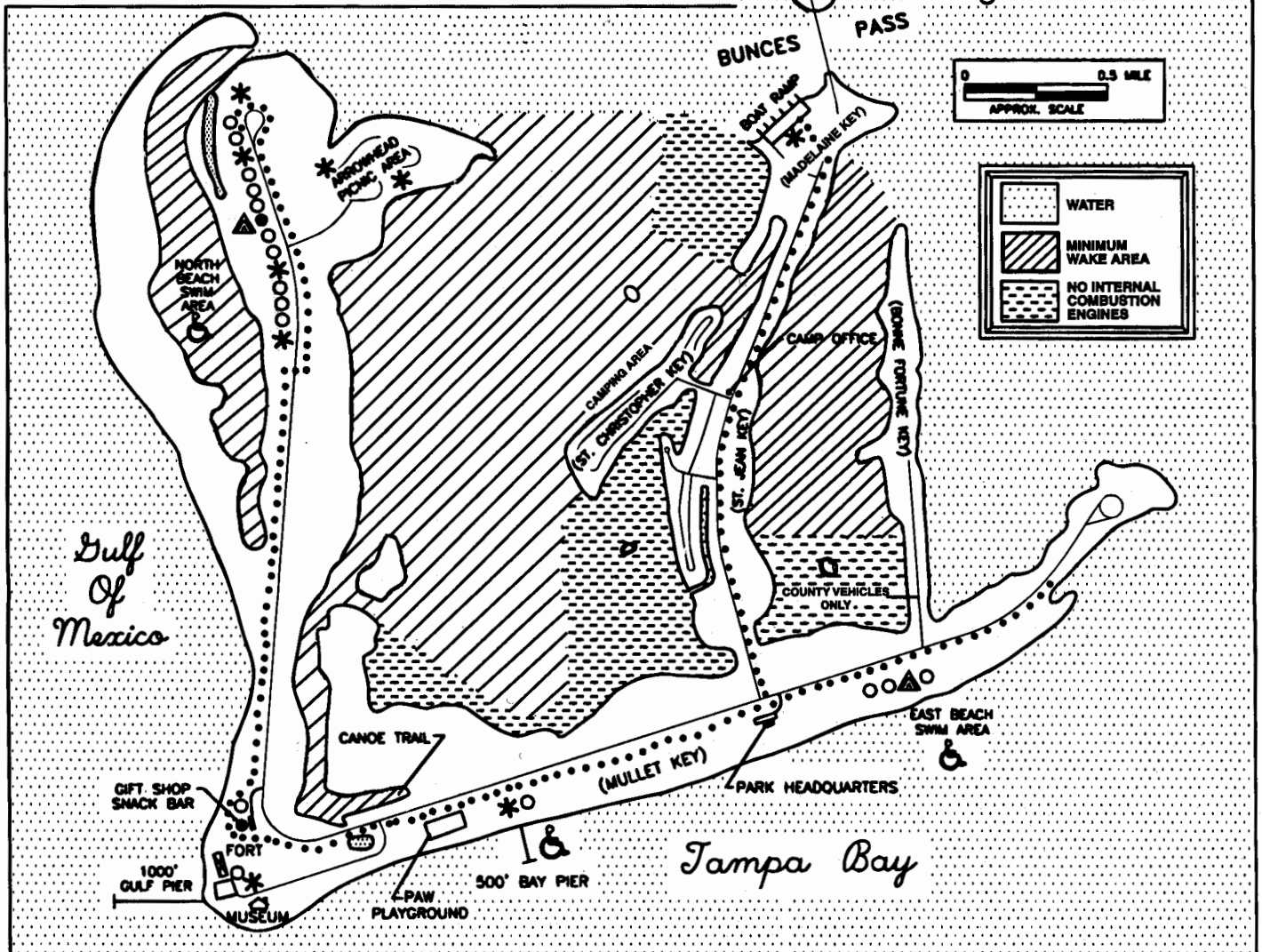
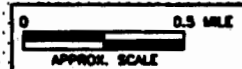
A PINELLAS COUNTY PARK

## LEGEND

- Handicapped/Wheelchair Access To Beach
- Restrooms
- Picnic Shelters
- Swim Centers with Showers
- Snack Bar/Gift Shop
- Multi-purpose Trail
- Fort
- Museum



Fort De Soto  
Park



# **FORT DE SOTO PARK**

**3500 PINELLAS BAYWAY S., TIERRA VERDE, FL 33715**

*Welcome to Pinellas County's most diversified park*

Fort De Soto is only one unit in the Pinellas County park system, developed with public funds for the enjoyment of our citizens and visitors.

The park is made up of five islands or keys: Madelaine Key, St. Jean Key, St. Christopher Key, Bonne Fortune Key, and the main island, Mullet Key. Together the keys total 1,136 acres with over six miles of beach frontage and several miles of waterfront along Mullet Key Bayou.

## **FACILITIES:**

- \* **1,000-foot Gulf Pier and 500-foot Bay Pier** for your fishing pleasure. Both are equipped with bait, tackle, and food concessions. Pier phones: (727) 864-9937 or (727) 864-3345.
- \* **Arrowhead, Family Picnic Area and Nature Trail:** No motor homes, trailers, or buses are allowed.
- \* **Historic fort built in 1898.** Self-guiding historical trail. Fort history and park literature may be obtained at the fort and park headquarters office. Fort tours available for groups by appointment call (727) 582-2267.

**Quartermaster Storehouse Museum.** Reconstructed army building from 1905. Historical information on display.

**Swimming beaches.** Lifeguards are on duty during swimming season. **For your own safety, swim ONLY in designated areas.**

**Fort snack bar and gift shop.** Phone: (727) 864-1376.

- \* **800' Boat Ramp** with vehicle and boat trailer parking.

**Family Camping Area:** 238 sites with water and electrical hook-up, picnic table, and charcoal grill. A camp store, dump stations, modern restrooms, and laundry facilities are provided for your convenience. For information call: (727) 582-2267. **Reservations can be made online at [www.pinellascounty.org](http://www.pinellascounty.org).**

- \* **North Beach & East Beach Picnic Areas:** Groups may reserve picnic shelters up to one year in advance, minimum of 50 people. For information, call: (727) 582-2267.

**Youth Camping:** Recognized youth groups may reserve up to 3 months in advance by calling (727) 582-2267.

**Multi-purpose Trail:** Seven miles of paved trail connecting North Beach, East Beach, Boat Ramp, and the Camping Area.

**Canoe Trail:** 2¼ mile self-guided trail.

**Barrier-Free Nature Trail:** 2,200 feet with 6 interpretive stations.

- \* **PICNIC TABLES AND GRILLS AVAILABLE IN THESE AREAS.**

## **PROHIBITED:**

- **ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**
- **PETS** in picnic shelters, restrooms, concession areas, campground or on beaches or fishing piers.
- **PETS** without a leash or with a leash over six feet in length, except in **Paw Playground**.
- Patrons in the park after dark, except on the fishing piers or in the camping area.
- Removing, damaging, or defacing trees, shrubs, or any other plants.
- Vehicles on the beaches or in the picnic areas.
- Feeding wildlife (including birds, squirrels, and raccoons).
- Swimming outside of designated swimming area.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- Permits for metal detecting on the beaches may be obtained at Park Headquarters.
- Park rangers are on duty 24 hours a day to serve and assist you.
- To have a ranger dispatched, call the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office at (727) 582-6200.
- The bridge tolls you pay go to the State Department of Transportation, not to support the park.

On Florida's West Coast at the southern tip of the Pinellas peninsula, lies Mullet Key. This island, situated at the mouth of Tampa Bay, has attracted Native American occupants, military strategists, and outdoor enthusiasts over the past several hundred years.

Native Americans harvested marine life from the pristine waters surrounding this island paradise. As the years went by, Europeans began to explore and settle North America, and life in Florida was never the same.

The following are a few of the historical highlights of Mullet Key and the Tampa Bay area:

**April 15, 1528** Spanish explorer Panfilo de Narvaez came ashore in the Tampa Bay area

**May 30, 1539** Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto began his trek across the southeastern United States.

**February 1849** A young Brevet Colonel named Robert E. Lee and three other U.S. Army Engineers surveyed the mouth of Tampa Bay and later recommended Egmont and Mullet Keys be fortified.

**1861** The Civil War breaks out with no fortification on either Mullet or Egmont Key. The two islands played a minor role during the war, serving as a Union blockade.

**December 21, 1877** The Army Board of Engineers recommended Mullet and Egmont Keys be retained as sites for fortifications to protect the shipping channel into Tampa Bay.

**November 29, 1882** Army engineers made the reservation of Mullet Key and Egmont Key permanent on this date.

**December 16, 1889 - May 1899** The Hillsborough County Board of Health maintained a quarantine station on Mullet Key. In 1901, the Marine Hospital Service took over jurisdiction of the station. The agency's name was changed to Public Health and Marine Hospital Service in 1902.

**April 25, 1898** The United States Congress declared war against Spain. The Navy dominated the early part of the conflict; the Army did not arrive until June 1898.

**November 1898** Construction began on the military posts on Mullet and Egmont Keys.

**April 4, 1900** The military reservation on Mullet Key was named Fort De Soto after the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto. It was officially a subpost of Fort Dade on Egmont Key.

**1900** Fort De Soto was garrisoned by a detachment of Company A, 1st Artillery.

**1900 - 1906** Twenty-nine post buildings were constructed at a cost of \$120,674.55.

**May 10, 1900** Captain Thomas H. Rees, engineer officer in charge of construction, announced the completion of the mortar battery within the \$155,000 budget. In fact, there was a balance of \$16.73 remaining.

**1901** Artillery ranks were reorganized and the company became the 1st Company, Coast Artillery.

**May - August 1902** Eight 12-inch mortars, Model 1890-M1, were mounted.

**1903** Two 3-inch Driggs-Seabury rapid-fire guns, Model 1898 were mounted.

**April 1907** The 1st Company shipped out and was replaced by the 39th Company, Coast Artillery.

**1907 - 1909** First and Second Infantry (Florida State Troops) and First Company, Coast Artillery Corps (National Guard of Florida) participated in training exercises.

**1908** The post quartermaster gave a report of conditions at Fort De Soto. Hoards of mosquitoes caused the men to suffer day and night.

**June 10, 1910** The Fort De Soto garrison was transferred to Fort Morgan, Alabama, and the fort became inactive with just a caretaker detachment remaining.

**September 1914** One sergeant and a game warden from the Department of Agriculture remained on the island.

**Early 1917** Four of the 12-inch mortars were dismantled and shipped to Fort Rosecrans, San Diego, California.

**May 25, 1923** Both Fort De Soto and Fort Dade were abandoned, leaving one caretaker at each post.

**1926** The U.S. Congress authorized the Secretary of War to sell Fort De Soto and Fort Dade. State, county, and city governments chose not to purchase the property. In 1928, two public bids were rejected.

**October 1921 - October 1932** Many storms and hurricanes hit Fort De Soto, reducing the value of the 26 buildings that were still standing. Battery Bigelow collapsed.

**1933** The Public Health Service was given permission to begin mosquito eradication.

**September 29, 1938** The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners bought the 271-acre tract on Mullet Key for \$12,500.

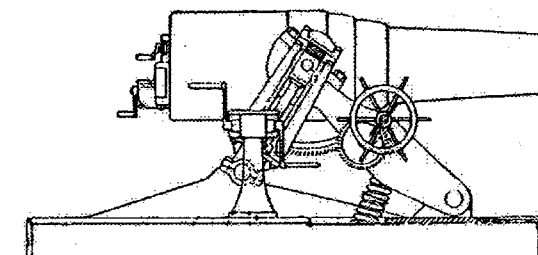
**1940** The War Department made a decision to turn Mullet Key into a bombing range and returned it to military status as a subpost of MacDill Field (June 1941). The County sold the tract back for \$18,404 on June 23, 1941.

**August 11, 1948** After World War II, Mullet Key was sold back to Pinellas County for \$26,495.24.

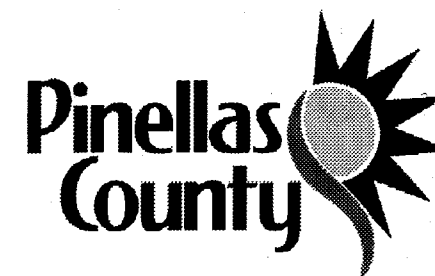
**May 11, 1963** Fort De Soto Park was officially dedicated.

**1977** The Fort De Soto batteries were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today park visitors can still view the remains of Battery Laidley and Battery Bigelow and some of the armaments from Fort De Soto and Fort Dade.

# Fort De Soto Historic Area



Pinellas County Parks  
"A Natural Attraction"



## The Fort De Soto Historic Trail And Quartermaster Storehouse Museum

The Fort De Soto Historic Trail was established in 1994 to identify the locations of the 29 original buildings and structures. The brick road between the parking lot and Battery Laidley is the original road built around 1899. Along the trail, you will find sections of original sidewalks and road curbing. Follow the trail signs and look for the photographs of the structures (circa 1905), and see what types of facilities the US Army provided.

The island was beautiful and the buildings were adequate, but life on the island was far from paradise for the soldiers. The mosquito problems made life miserable here. The post quartermaster gave this report in 1908:

*"The suffering of the men daily at work or drill has been greater than can be imagined by any who have not actually experienced it. There have been nights that the men have had no sleep due to mosquitoes in quarters, even though mosquito bars (nets) are used. At present, life for the men is a torture both night and day, and the mosquitoes have to be fought with a bush continuously whether at work or resting."*

Battery Laidley was the primary defense for Fort De Soto. In 1902, eight 12-inch M 1890-M1 mortars, with a maximum range of 6.8 miles were mounted. These weapons were manufactured in Watervliet Arsenal, Watervliet, New York.

When a ship was sighted, the coordinates were relayed from observation points to the Relocating Room and then to the Data Booth where it was posted for the gun crews to view. Each gun required a 12 man crew to manually load and aim the gun. The guns had a 54-pound powder charge, which was placed after the projectiles were loaded. Each projectile weighed between 800 and 1046 pounds.

Battery Bigelow was the secondary defense for the fort. Two 3-inch, 15 pound, Driggs-Seabury Rapid Fire Guns, Model 1898 with a maximum range of 4.5 miles, were mounted in this battery. These guns were used for close range and to protect the

minefields from torpedo boats and submarine boats at the harbor entrance.

Fort De Soto was never the site of any major battle. In fact, the weapons of Fort De Soto and Fort Dade were never fired in anger at an enemy. However, that era was significant in terms of the evolution of modern weaponry.

We salute all the fine men and all the troops that have served in our armed forces. We thank each one for their dedication in obtaining and preserving the freedom this country has come to love and cherish.

The Fort De Soto Quartermaster Storehouse Museum opened to the public on November 11, 2000, as a fitting tribute to all veterans. It is a reconstruction of the Army Quartermaster Storehouse that was built prior to 1905. Around 1905 the Army had ideas to convert the building into a bowling alley for the troops. Plans were drawn up to extend the building another forty feet and install two bowling lanes. The Brunswick, Balke, Collander Company was contacted and a price estimate of \$900 was given to install the equipment. This idea was rejected officially in April 1909. One year later the post was considered obsolete and the troops were transferred to Fort Morgan, Alabama.

Fort De Soto Park staff constructed this building. The interior furnishings and exhibits were made possible by the Friends of Fort De Soto, Inc., through a grant from the Historical Museums Grants-in-Aid. Program with assistance provided by the Bureau of Historical Museums, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, Secretary of State and the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners.

